

If you TELL, you tend to say something straight out, and it's often boring. If you SHOW, then the writing is longer, but far more powerful.

TELL: Cassandra, the model was really tall and really stuck up.

SHOW: Cassandra strolled into our house like she was on a catwalk. 'Hi,' she said and looked as if she was bored already. She did the long slow model walk to the nearest chair, ducking her head under the lounge room light as if she would hit it. She was tall, but trust me, she wasn't that tall.

TELL: Mandy was always really confident and she was kind too.

SHOW: The traffic lights were just starting to flash red.

'Come on,' cried Mandy as she charged across the street. 'We'll be late.'

Behind us an old lady followed. She shuffled into the intersection, head bowed, shopping bag on her arm. The lights were totally red now. Suddenly there was a loud blast of a horn.

I looked back, the old lady was only halfway across and a car was edging forward impatiently. Then I saw Mandy. She stepped back onto the road and held up her hand firmly to the car. Then taking the old lady's arm, she helped her slowly, painstakingly to the safety of the footpath.

TELL: My grandmother used to be a famous ballet dancer but now she's really old and frail.

SHOW: Ma had come to the front door to greet us. She always calls everyone 'dear'. It's easier. She's ninety one and tends to get all the names mixed up. She once used to be a great ballet dancer. She'd toured the world – now you could see all the veins stand out in her hands just from the effort of standing up. (You Choose, Ch 5 - my Year 6 novel)

TELL: The old house was really dark and creepy. Katy and I were trying to be brave.

SHOW: It was dark in the house, but the light at the top of the stairs made shadows where none should be. Weird. There should have been silence too, but all around us were these tiny creaking sounds, so low I wondered if they were real. Then came a scurry of feet, way too large to be mice.

'Rats?' whispered Katy. I shook my head and swallowed hard.

'I don't think so,' I muttered. My mouth was dry.

It takes longer to Show, not Tell. Yet how much more convincing is the writing?

© Jen McVeity